

VICE NEWS

Her Daughter Was Kidnapped by Traffickers. So She Trafficked Herself.

A Bangladeshi mother decided to take matters into her own hands when her 16-year-old daughter went missing.



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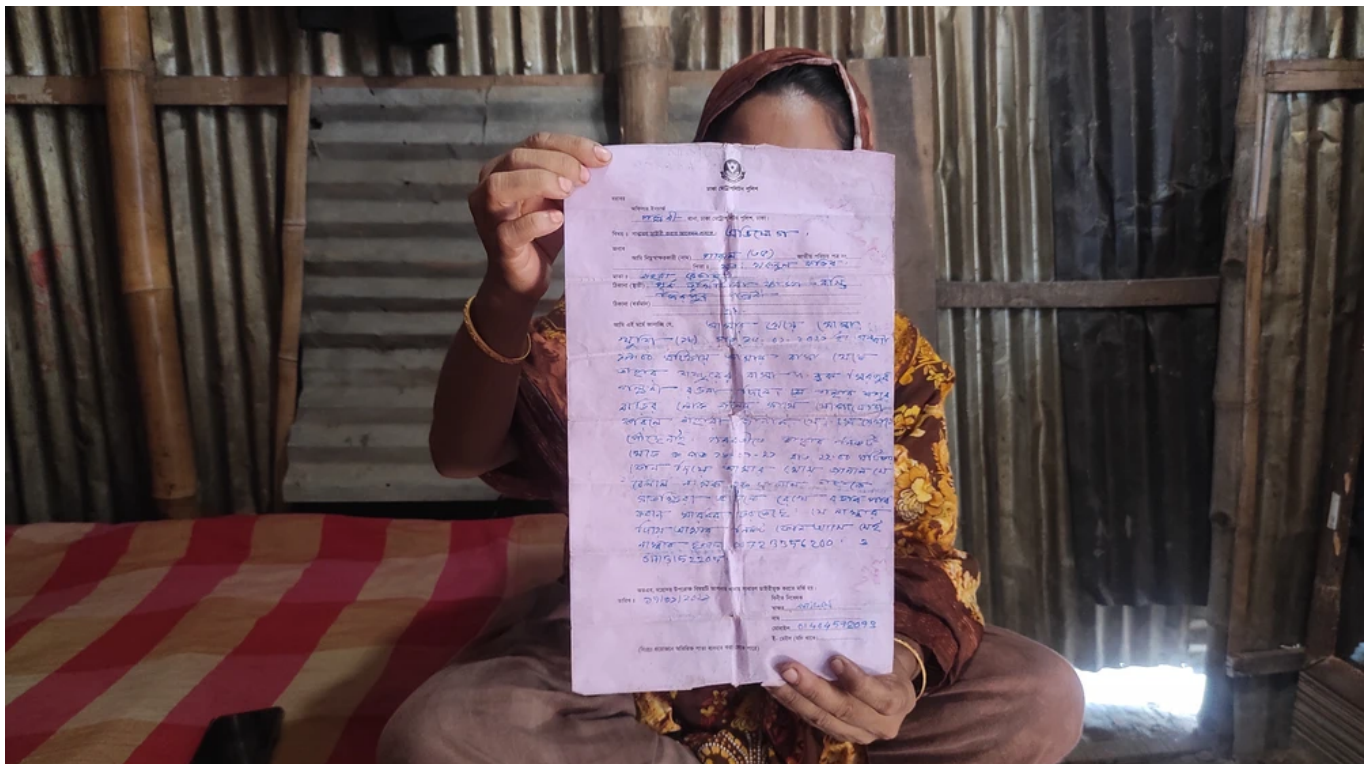
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JAKARTA, ID

MR

By Muktadir Rashid

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ASIYA* SHOWS THE MISSING REPORT THAT SHE REGISTERED AT THE LOCAL POLICE STATION. PHOTO: MUKTADIR RASHID

the pair's story stunned them, and then later, everyone in Bangladesh.

Asiya willingly trafficked herself into India so that she could rescue Marium, who had fallen victim to a cross-border trafficking ring.

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Asiya's and Marium's names have been changed for their safety.

The mother of four recounted her extraordinary journey from her home in a slum outside Bangladesh's capital Dhaka to VICE World News. "I did it not just for my eldest daughter. It was for many others, too," she said.

Upon the two women's return, Bangladesh's special security force, the Rapid Action Battalion, arrested three men whom they accused of having trafficked women and children for over a decade.

At least 20,000 Bangladeshi women and children are trafficked across the mostly-porous and unfenced border with India every year. Most never make it back.

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LUIS CHAPARRO

08.10.21

U family's acquaintance. The supposed job offer was in a district near the border with India.

"I thought the job would be good for me. So, when he came and said, 'Let's go,' I packed up and went with him," Marium said.



A FAMILY PHOTO OF THE FAMILY IN ASIYA'S HOME OUTSIDE DHAKA. PHOTO: MUKTADIR RASHID

Along the way, the recruiter handed Marium over to two other men. Once they reached the border, she realised what was happening.

"It was the middle of the night, and I started crying," she said. "But they pushed me into a boat." She convinced a man on the passenger boat—a stranger—to lend her his cellphone. She immediately called her mother.

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“I’m being taken to India! Save me!” Marium told Asiya, along with the names of her captors, before they snatched the phone from her.

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Within a few days, Marium ended up at a brothel in the eastern Indian state of Bihar.

Back in Dhaka, Asiya went to the police station and filed a missing person complaint. She was assured of an investigation, she said, but 40 days passed without any word of her daughter.

In February, the desperate mother contacted a man whom Marium had named on the call as one of her traffickers. She told him she wanted a job abroad, too. He told her there was one in India.

“This is exactly what I wanted,” she told VICE World News.

Asiya then took out all her savings—Taka 60,000 (\$703)—and left for the border.

“I hid the money under a wig and covered my head with a scarf,” she said. In a few days, she found herself at a brothel

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Disappointed, she stayed there until June, when her husband called and said Marium contacted him through a client's cellphone. Marium gave her location—it was about 1,000 kilometres (800 miles) away from New Delhi.

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In February, the desperate mother contacted a man whom Marium had named on the call as one of her traffickers. She told him she wanted a job abroad, too. He told her there was one in India. “This is exactly what I wanted,” she told VICE World News.

Asiya escaped the brothel in the middle of the night. With the help of Marium's client and some locals, they were finally reunited in New Delhi.

“On the night of June 18, I got my daughter back,” said Asiya. “The brothel owner confessed that he bought my daughter for \$3,404 from Bangladesh.”

traffickers. The three accused—Mohammad Kalu, 40, Mohammad Shohag, 32, and Billal Hossain, 41—were revealed to be running a larger trafficking ring with 25 other perpetrators. Each victim was sold for \$1,173 to \$1,760.

**rape video
Implicated a
TikToker in a
Human
Trafficking
Ring**

SHAMANI JOSHI

06.04.21

Human trafficking is the world's second-most lucrative crime. It's a \$200-billion illegal industry, and a quarter of that money is from South Asia, according to a UN report.

Police investigations and government monitoring reports show a disturbing rise in human trafficking in the region despite the pandemic, and new ways South Asian women are getting trapped.

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This year, Indian police found traffickers using social media platforms such as Facebook and TikTok, and employing “influencers” to prey on women.



RAPID ACTION FORCE OFFICIALS STAND WITH THE ARRESTED MEN WHO TRAFFICKED ASIYA AND MARIUM. PHOTO: RAPID ACTION FORCE

“The traffickers keep updating their strategies and tricks to traffic vulnerable women,” Mohammad Tariqul Islam, the director of the Bangladesh chapter of Justice and Care, a global anti-slavery organisation, told VICE World News. “But some older patterns such as fake job offers, love affairs or marriages remain constant.”

India continues to be the main destination or transit point of trafficked Bangladeshi women. The BSF has documented at least 500,000 Bangladeshi women and children, aged 12 to 30 years, who have been sold to agents in India.

“Traffickers take advantage of the coordination gap between Indian and Bangladeshi law enforcement and special agencies,” said Islam. “If we join forces, and our intelligence, to track these people and their paper trail, so many lives would be saved.”



A MAP PROVIDED BY BANGLADESH'S RAPID ACTION BATTALION SHOWS THE ROUTE TAKEN BY THE TRAFFICKERS WHO SMUGGLED AND SOLD ASIYA AND MARIUM. PHOTO: RAPID ACTION BATTALION

There is no single definitive set of data on how many Bangladeshi women get trafficked every year. India's Border Security Force (BSF) estimates that number to be around 50,000. In the last 10 years, however, only about 2,000 trafficked women have been brought back home.

Islam said the data is anecdotal because of the clandestine nature of the crime. But, he added, many more slip through the cracks because most families don't go to the police out of fear or lack of awareness.

"In fact, in the cases where families report their missing kin to the police, the rescue rate is up to 70 percent," he said.

In the meantime, Asiya and Marium fear reprisal from the trafficking network they exposed. But Asiya said her ordeal was worth it because she's seen other young girls from her slum disappearing the way her daughter did.

"We still live with anxiety and trauma," she said.

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